

Semyon Vilenskiy



This is me in 1954. I returned from the camp recently. My friend, a beginner in art photography, took this photo.

In autumn 1954 I was released from the GULAG. I didn't have the right to live in Moscow and was sent to Sharya town, Kostroma region, 700 km from Moscow, where my uncle Yosif Vilenskiy was director of a timber industry enterprise. I knew that my cousin brother Yonia Vilenskiy, my father brother Mark Vilenskiy's son, lived in Blagoveschensk [about 680 km east of Moscow]. I liked him, when I was a child. Without giving it much thought I bought a train ticket to Blagoveschensk. My brother met me in Blagoveschensk. Then my father called me and said: 'Come back immediately'.

It turned out that my case was reviewed by Chief military prosecution office and the officer responsible for my case wanted to see me. My father took every effort to expedite my rehabilitation. I went to Moscow and told them about my case. A year later my case was reviewed and I obtained a certificate of rehabilitation in late 1956. When I returned, I stayed with my uncle in Sharya. He fed me as if I was a child. He was nice and didn't allow me to go to work. After rehabilitation I went back to Moscow before the new 1957 Year.

Soon I began to publish my works. I could not have my poems published since their themes did not fit the Soviet publication rules. I translated poems by national authors having line by line translation and wrote reviews. My university friends taught me this job and published the poems under their names since not a single Soviet publication would dare to publish the author, who had been in jail 8 years under a political conviction. They gave me money for these publications. After rehabilitation they resumed my University status. I finished 5 years, but I didn't defend my diploma. I didn't feel I needed this. By that time I was already a literature professional. I wasn't going to do teaching ever. Being a member of the trade union of literature workers, I did not have to be a staff employee and authorities could not blame me of being a parasite. This enabled me to walk across Russia and stay in remote villages. This became a way of my life. I met people and gained great life experience. Before the GULAG I was a very cheerful young man, but I lost a lot of this joyousness. On the other hand, I gained the experience and knowledge of people that I needed as a writer and a human being.